

The Menard administration building will be demolished



The Menard Correctional Center administration building

Bids are due to the state by October 30 to demolish the old administration building at Menard Correctional Center in Chester.

Tom Shaer, a spokesman for the Illinois Department of Corrections, said it will then take 90 days to finalize a contract with the successful bidder.

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“We hope for demolition to start by February 15,” said Shaer. “A double fence will have to be put up before any walls come down. They will do the demolition from the outside in.”

Shaer said the department administration is not yet certain if the building will be replaced.

“We are pretty efficient with the taxpayers’ money,” said Shaer. “If we need it, we will replace it, and if we don’t need it, we won’t. We will weigh it in terms of priority and available funds.”

The work will be handled through the Illinois Capital Development Board.

Shaer said the building is no longer fit for use by the prison. It has been unused since 2006 or 2007.

An old ice house inside the prison walls is also scheduled for demolition.

The administration building is as old as the prison itself. Construction began on Southern Illinois Penitentiary in the spring of 1878, and it was ready to receive its first prisoners by October of that year. By January 1, 1879, the prison housed 516 convicts. The building appears today just as it did when first built.

Menard was constructed under the same plans as the Joliet prison and is the second oldest in the state.